

Battle Rhythm

Lieutenant Colonel Daniel J. Klecker, US Army, and
Major Jay Peterson, US Army

FUNCTIONAL BATTLE RHYTHM minimizes the friction inherent in combat activities by providing predictability to subordinates and better synchronizing different echelons of command. However, battle rhythm itself is an intangible commodity that is often difficult to embrace. This article proposes a doctrinal definition for battle rhythm, analyzes battle rhythm models and provides discussion and recommendations within such a framework.

Current Army and joint doctrine do not define the term “battle rhythm.” A proposed doctrinal definition for battle rhythm is “a deliberate cycle of command, staff and unit activities intended to synchronize current and future operations.” Activities at each echelon must incorporate higher headquarters’ guidance and commander’s intent, and subordinate units’ requirements for mission planning, preparation and execution.

Timing Key Events. A synchronization process is often referred to as the targeting or wargame process. Regardless of the semantics, the targeting process synchronizes the battlefield operating systems (BOS) in time, space, purpose and end state. A functional battle rhythm synchronizes the BOS in time, space and purpose and across different echelons of command. This article is not intended to detail the mechanics of the targeting process but rather to address and illustrate effective timing of targeting and other key functions across three command echelons in the brigade task force.

Observations at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) indicate that many units do not arrive at their training rotation with an established battle rhythm. Most units discover the need for a more formalized battle rhythm that is integrated with its higher and subordinate units and attempt to develop one during the rotation. Unfortunately, unfamiliarity with such a process, when combined with enemy activity, produces friction and degrades a valuable training opportunity. JRTC scenarios compress activities to a greater extent than a unit will probably experience on the future battlefield. Therefore, a battle rhythm that is effective at the JRTC will likely prove functional elsewhere.

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The need for a predictable, synchronized battle rhythm is especially critical during operations in low-intensity conflict environments. Low intensity conflict, when the enemy situation is often vague, creates conditions in which an effective battle rhythm significantly enhances unit performance. During other operations, effective time management, use of realistic timelines and appropriate use of functional standing operating procedures usually produce an effective battle rhythm.

This article focuses on light infantry brigade operations. The genesis of an effective battle rhythm is an effective targeting process at the brigade level. To be most effective and provide predictability during low-intensity operations, brigades should focus on the future fight and plan at least 48 hours out. This allows time to acquire and develop intelligence about the enemy and adequate time to plan, coordinate, integrate and synchronize the assets he has or can request. The end state of the brigade targeting process should be a fragmentary order (FRAGO) directing subordinate activities two days out and beyond. Additionally, as the brigade focuses on future operations (related to the mission’s end state) the FRAGO would presumably address the transition of BOS elements to the future operation.

This need for battle rhythm is evident at the JRTC. The typical exercise includes establishing a lodgment, either through an airborne assault or air assault forced entry into the battlefield, as the initial mission. At the JRTC, rotational brigades that

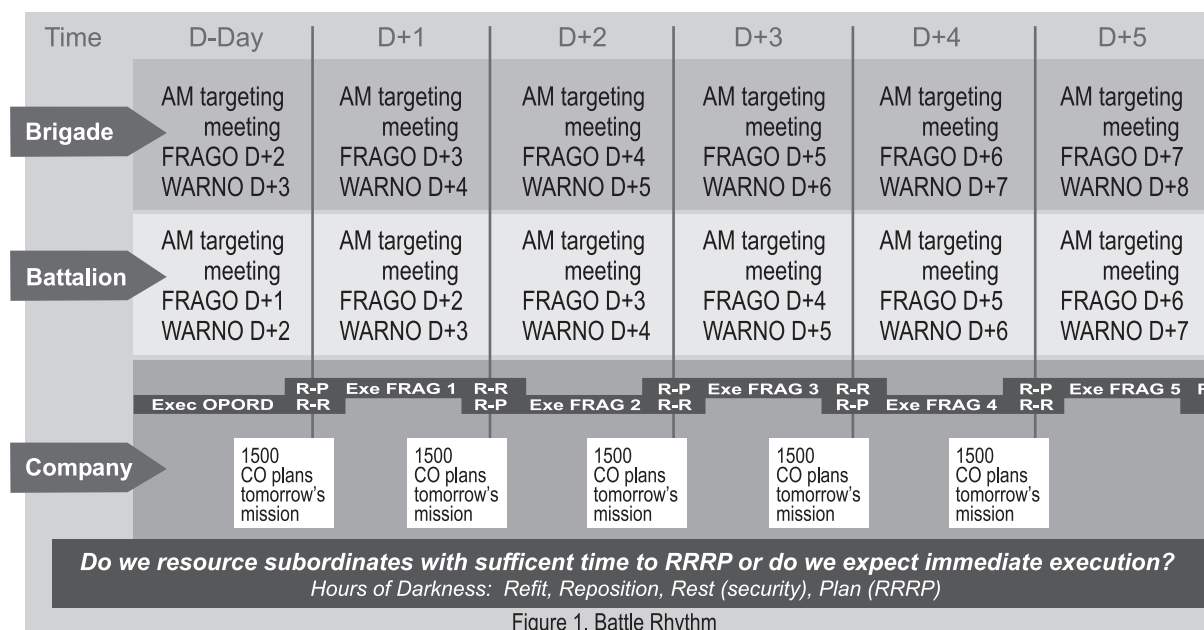


Figure 1. Battle Rhythm

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maintain a 48-hour battle rhythm and whose FRAGOs address future operations increase the subordinate battalions' ability to synchronize their fight with the higher command's end state. Without some form of battle rhythm, most units will remain reactive and subordinate units will be unable to anticipate branches and sequels to their current mission. Such scenarios often leave soldiers trying to do great things—without the required time for planning and preparation.

The brigade targeting meeting, conducted on D-Day, addresses battalion activities that must occur on D+2 and beyond. The battalion targeting meeting addresses the next 24 hours. Companies are continually executing operations but must have an opportunity to conduct adequate planning and preparation for future operations (Figure 1). An established battle rhythm gives the companies a predictable window to conduct activities such as future planning, logistic operations and necessary movement.

Last-minute changes. There should be a predictable point when a FRAGO will be approved and subordinates receive guidance in time for planning and preparation. For the purpose of discussion, the brigade should make no more changes to its plan after an early-morning conference call between the bri-

gade and battalion commanders (Figure 2). This practice permits the company commanders to execute today's mission while the battalion staff begins planning tomorrow's activities and issues an appropriate FRAGO. The battalion FRAGO should be disseminated no later than 1500 hours daily to company commanders, allowing the minimum time necessary for the companies to conduct troop leading procedures while continuing to execute the current mission.

Frequent observation of units training at the JRTC reveals that higher headquarters lack appreciation for impacts of last-minute decisions on subordinate unit commanders. Most units possess the flexibility to react to a directive such as "change in plans, move your company to Zone C06 to destroy an enemy mortar acquired by the Q-36 radar at grid 123456." The unit may be able to move quickly and begin searching for the enemy mortar, but if there is insufficient time for troop leading procedures, avoidable friction usually occurs and companies pay an unnecessarily high cost to accomplish the mission. Examples of activities routinely displaced by last-minute changes include: subordinate leader estimates, fire planning, preparation of vehicles for troop movement, adequate movement planning (cross leveling of key personnel and equipment), delivery of mission specific equipment or munitions and timely task organization.

Retaining the initiative. Units training at the JRTC usually intend to establish a battle rhythm but are often distracted by unexpected threats or requirements that occur inside the decision cycles of the relevant headquarters. For example, an untemplated enemy mortar could disrupt establishment of essential brigade assets such as firing batteries or logis-

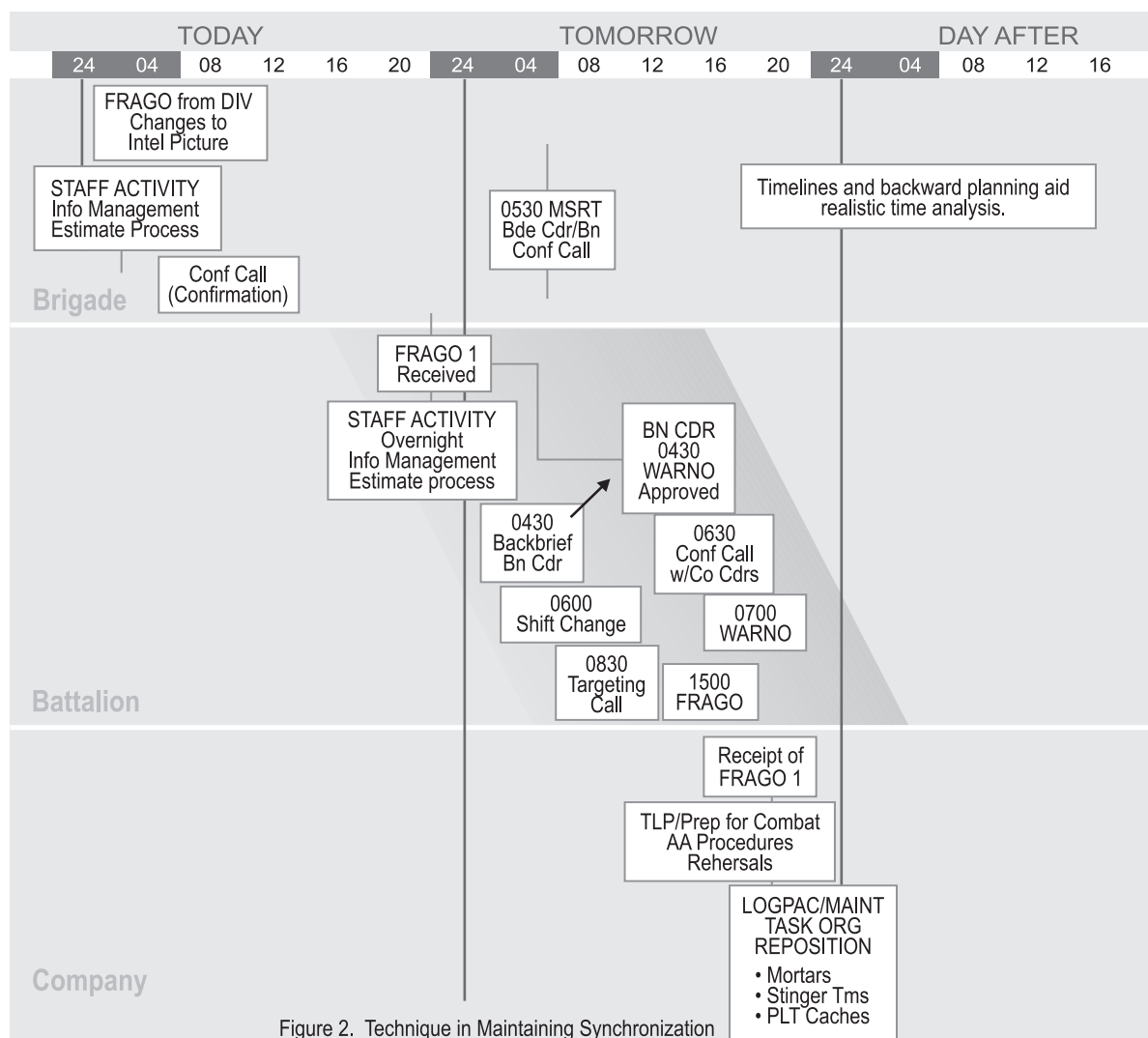


Figure 2. Technique in Maintaining Synchronization

tic sites. Retaining a reserve (sometimes locally referred to as a quick reaction force) under brigade control is an option that keeps the enemy out of the friendly force's decision cycle, allowing better opportunity for an undisturbed battle rhythm.

Considerations for the task organization of a reserve should include mobility, firepower, lethality, command and control (C2) and logistics. This reserve can service targets in the "now" decision cycle and can be employed using battledrill checklists. While the reserve services these targets, subordinate units can continue to develop the situation in their zones and fight the battle as they had earlier planned. Reserves based upon an infantry platoon augmented with tanks have been employed successfully at the JRTC.

Positioning the reserve is also an important consideration. Locating the reserve near vulnerable friendly assets should be considered, particularly early in the deployment process, until other force

protection measures have had sufficient time to mature. The reserve could locate near the brigade tactical operations center (TOC), aviation assembly areas, field artillery position areas or the brigade support area. Proximity to subordinate units may also be an important consideration.

Technique in Maintaining Synchronization.

Figure 2 provides an example timing of activities that could occur within an infantry brigade. This example demonstrates the activities of higher headquarters in synchronization with subordinates to reach company execution. While entries on the timeline are not exhaustive, they illustrate how to nest and deconflict key activities across three echelons of command.

In this example, the brigade targeting team conducts the targeting process and issues a brigade FRAGO for battalion execution beyond 48 hours from the current time. The battalion receives the brigade FRAGO during the night and conducts ini-

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tial analysis, planning and preparation for the morning's targeting meeting. At 0530, the brigade commander conducts a conference call with all of his commanders, highlighting any areas of concern, verifying his intent for the next 48 hours. This conference call should be the last time that the brigade influences subordinate activities in the subsequent 24-hour period. The shift-change briefing occurs in the battalion TOC at 0600 hours, is attended by all key staff members and serves as the commander's morning update. The briefing is immediately followed by a battalion commander's net call with company commanders to provide the commander any additional information he requires.

Using the brigade FRAGO and information provided at the shift-change brief and discussions with the brigade and company commanders, the battalion commander and targeting team conduct the morning's targeting meeting. Company commanders are executing today's mission while the battalion commander and staff plan tomorrow's activities. Activities at the brigade TOC include a targeting process and planning for the next period, 36 to 48 hours ahead of the company.

The targeting process should result in predictable products and may include:

- FRAGO, with updated graphics as required.
- Reconnaissance and security plan, situation template, event template and intelligence summary.
- Overlay of both friendly and enemy minefields.

The battalion staff develops and reproduces the products for dissemination to subordinate units by 1500 hours today so that they can plan for tomorrow's execution.

One technique for distributing the FRAGO involves the commander during his battlefield circulation. He can personally articulate the intent and receive confirmation briefs by the company commanders. When this technique is not possible, other expedient means can be used and the battalion commander can follow later with a radio conference call.

Similar techniques could be considered by the brigade commander; however, the larger distances involved in brigade operations may render FRAGO distribution via the brigade commander's battlefield circulation often infeasible. Sending the products of the targeting process to subordinates by tactical facsimile is a prompt and secure method of distribution. Subsequent battlefield circulation or voice communication can be used to elaborate the higher commander's intent and provide a vehicle for subordinate commander's confirmation briefs.

Displacing Assets. The displacement of critical assets must be considered within the framework of the unit's battle rhythm. Unit C² and combat service support facilities may have to displace during the course of operations. If possible, displacement timing should be planned around activities supporting the unit's battle rhythm. Daily assessing the necessity of TOC displacement will allow the unit to situate alternate nodes for C² such as the brigade tactical command post to prevent disrupting the established battle rhythm. The goal is to decide whether, what, when and where to displace—rather than accept the enemy's dictates. Enemy penetration of the decision cycle disrupts battle rhythm, causes difficulty in evacuating casualties and equipment and slow unit momentum.

Synchronizing all echelons of command is difficult. The desired end state of a unit battle rhythm is synchronized activities at all echelons. Establishing a battle rhythm is one approach to providing subordinate leaders and soldiers with predictability and appropriate time to plan and prepare for future operations, while focusing on the immediate fight. The result will be greater likelihood for successful operations that meet the commander's intent while minimizing friction and personnel and equipment losses. **MR**

Lieutenant Colonel Daniel J. Klecker is currently serving as an instructor at the Combined Arms Services and Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He received a B.A. from the US Military Academy, an M.S. from Central Michigan University and an M.M.A.S. from the US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth. He has served in a variety of command and staff positions in the Continental United States, to include battalion commander, Recruiting Command, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; executive officer, Office of the Commanding General, Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana; observer controller, JRTC, Fort Polk; and S3, 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Assault), Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Major Jay L. Peterson is a senior operations observer controller, Task Force 2, Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana. He received a B.A. from the California University of Pennsylvania and an M.A. from Louisiana State University. He has served in a variety of command and staff positions in the Continental United States and Korea, to include XO, Command Group, JRTC, Fort Polk; assistant operations observer controller, Task Force 1, JRTC, Fort Polk; company observer controller, Task Force 1, JRTC, Fort Polk; and company commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, Korea.